

**Goering, Nelson. 2023. *Prosody in Medieval English and Norse*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Pp. xiii + 375. ISBN 9780197267462.**

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While the title of Goering’s book is in one sense admirably precise, it does not convey the importance of his study not only for historical linguistics, but also for metre in the two traditions. In both regards, the book represents a considerable advance and/or raises crucial points, and it will thus become an important point of reference for the future. In *Prosody*, as in his other scholarship, Goering meticulously and even-handedly evaluates various scholarly contribution against the primary evidence, and in doing so he takes care to explain the dynamics involved in a manner accessible not only to historical linguists and metrists, but also to more “ordinary” scholars of Old English (OE) and Old Norse (ON). More than that, Goering subjects his data to detailed philological scrutiny, which is all the more important in a time when corpus-based analyses have come to draw many linguists’ attention away from the quality of the data and towards their quantity. Overall, then, I find *Prosody* worthy of high praise.

The core enterprise of *Prosody* is to explore the diachronic continuity of the basic prosodic building-block of the “bimoraic trochee with left-to-right foot formation” (84). *Trochee* is here not the common metrical term but means a unit of two morae with stress to the left: either *sunu* (two short vowels) or *rond* (short vowel + consonant cluster). Goering applies this analysis to OE and ON alike, but as I shall argue below, the issues with using it in ON may be greater than Goering conveys.

Rather than “spreading it thin,” I have opted to focus on two aspects of *Prosody*. The first is how it advances our knowledge by evaluating earlier scholarship in tandem with the data. The second is how *Prosody* invites further study through its analysis of ON syllabification.

Goering’s treatment of previous scholarship is balanced and respectful, and yet he takes care to clearly point out inconsistencies. Thus, for instance, he writes “This is simply not true” about the claim that the reality of resolution has some intrinsic link to Sievers’ four-position system of metrical analysis, a view advanced by prominent metrists in the field (37; with reference to Fulk 2002, 337–40; Yakovlev 2008, 62–64; Pascual 2016, 29–30). In a similar manner, important components of Paul Kiparsky’s analysis are refuted (176–77, 181; with reference to Kiparsky 2009, 26). These aspects of the book deserve some attention in their own right, since every logical or factual error in previous scholarship that is identified constitutes an advance of knowledge, and research cannot meaningfully function if scholars do not remain committed to pointing out such flaws. *Prosody* is exemplary in performing this task in a clear and respectful manner. Only in the case of one important study could I have wished that the author’s evaluation had been more clearly communicated. Seiichi Suzuki’s (2014) study of eddic metre is far more voluminous than any previous one, and being relatively recent, it is a natural point of reference for the scholar. For a number of reasons, however, including an analysis

based on linguistic forms that in many instances are clearly later than the poems under study, Suzuki's book must be used with caution. Goering is aware of this problem, but he conveys it only in a footnote (196) and once in passing in the text (209), elsewhere using Suzuki's study as the main point of reference to metrical data. This makes sense, in so far as Suzuki's study is not very central to the topics under discussion, but thoughtful presentation of earlier scholarship is one of Goering's strengths, and when dealing with a reference work like that of Suzuki, a more explicit assessment would have been welcome.

In general, Goering's evaluation of scholarship against the sources is exemplary. The most obvious example may be that while R. D. Fulk posited resolution in the twelfth-century *Poema morale*, Donka Minkova later challenged this (Fulk 2002; Minkova 2016). Scrutinising the data of both, Goering concludes that in some instances Minkova's non-resoluble forms have resolvable variants in other manuscripts, whereas in others, the assumed, non-resoluble form was in fact resolvable (e.g. because open-syllable lengthening had not yet occurred in the language of the poem). To such scrutiny of earlier scholarship, Goering adds his own investigation of the source (141–43).

In other words, Fulk presented striking evidence for resolution, Minkova questioned this, and through Goering's detailed evaluation, Fulk's interpretation stands stronger than it previously did, having resisted one attempt at falsification. Importantly, however, this favourable development is evident only now, through Goering's study. Had such a study not been executed, scholars would only have been presented with the mutually exclusive hypotheses of Fulk and Minkova, and we would have seen no advancement of knowledge, at least not in written form. In the OE section overall, Goering proceeds in a similar manner, and he takes considerable pains to evaluate potential contrary evidence.

In the ON section, things are a bit different, and mainly for two reasons. First, due to certain metrical peculiarities in ON, two camps of metrical-prosodic analysis have formed, both with reasonable arguments on their side. Second, these same peculiarities cause certain difficulties for a bimoraic-throchee analysis, and there exists no earlier scholarship that has attempted to bridge the gap between the two camps. Goering must therefore do so from scratch, which is a challenging proposition. I would argue that he does not fully succeed, but that his observations must nonetheless be taken seriously, meaning that scholars have not yet arrived at a fully satisfactory analysis. To my mind, this makes the ON section of the book the most interesting one, not only consolidating our knowledge, but also suggesting gaps that need to be filled. I would also stress that the question is an important one not only from the perspective of historical linguistics, but for the study of ON poetry overall. For instance, there still exists no good handbook of ON metre, and until this question is resolved, such a handbook cannot be written without leaving one of the most basic parameters for metrical analysis without an adequate description.

The matter revolves around syllabification and syllabic length. Somewhat simplified, one might say that just like Greek and Latin, OE seems to attribute a single intervocalic consonant to the following syllable: *su-nu*. This may also be expressed in terms of sonority, meaning the degree of voice or other sounds produced by a phoneme or allophone. Vowels are the most sonorous sounds in Germanic languages, and as such, they constitute the nuclei of syllables. Based on this observation, the syllabification *su-nu* entails that the first syllable ends before the sonority minimum, here *n*. Containing only a short vowel (or mora), the first syllable of *su-nu* is short. By contrast, a long vowel

or a short vowel + one consonant gives a long syllable. In a monosyllabic word ending in a consonant, there is no following syllable for the consonant to attach to, and words like *scip* therefore count as long. There is general consensus that this is an adequate description of syllabification in OE. The more daring proposition is that, after some discussion, Goering lands on the same analysis for ON. This is where matters get interesting.

While mainly presenting arguments in support of his proposed syllabification, Goering does note that in hiatus, long vowels resolve in ON, that is, a word like *búa* scans as metrically identical to a word like *vita*. This cannot be accommodated by Goering's syllabification, since the division *bú-a* would leave a long vowel in the first syllable, *vi-ta* a short. The metrical equivalence of words like these therefore suggests the syllabification *vit-a*, making both *-ú-* and *-it-* bimoraic, which would explain the fact that they are treated as equivalents. This analysis seems to indicate that in ON poetry, a short syllable had not one but two morae, and several ON metrists assume that this was the case.

Goering notes that hiatus forms are a problem for his syllabification, but in other regards, he argues, the ON evidence is compatible with the *su-nu* type syllabification (159). I would suggest, however, that there are two more pieces to the puzzle that need to be taken into account, one relating to ON rhymes, the other to cohesion or length by position.

One complication with the bimoraic = long hypothesis relates to ON *hendingar* or "internal rhymes," found in the metre *dróttkvætt*. Based on arguments presented by Þorgeir Sigurðsson and Kristján Árnason, Klaus Johan Myrvoll has performed a meticulous study showing that these rhymes progress *up to and including* the sonority minimum (Þorgeir Sigurðsson 2001; Kristján Árnason 2007; a comprehensive overview of what does and does not rhyme is found in Myrvoll 2014, 53–82). In light of this evidence, Goering's assumption that the syllable ends *before* the sonority minimum is difficult to uphold (156). Assuming that the boundary goes after the sonority minimum would increase the length of many syllables, but not all, as compared to Goering's analysis. Thus, Goering notes that words such as *flotnar* and *niðjar* cannot be resolved, which indicates that their first syllables count as long, and in these instances, the data from *hendingar* would concur with Goering in the segmentation *flot-nar* and *nið-jar*, that is, with a bimoraic first syllable (163). Here, Goering's analysis, making *flot-* and *nið-* long in themselves, would solve the problem for words containing such structures, but in most instances, the evidence from *hendingar* has the opposite effect. As far as I can see, the only way to accommodate all the evidence would be to assume that for purposes of sonority, the syllabic boundary falls after the sonority minimum, but with regard to quantity, cohesion applies, that is, syllables gain length if additional consonants follow. At least in the metre *dróttkvætt*, cohesion appears to apply between words, and it therefore does not seem too bold to assume that it also does so within the more restricted environment of single words. Indeed, perhaps this may have been a contributing factor for making cohesion between words viable in the first place.

In order to evaluate the options, further study of cohesion would be necessary. In *dróttkvætt*, only trimoraic syllables appear to count as long, and bimoraic stresses are thus followed by consonants, making them trimoraic by cohesion (Myrvoll 2016, 242–29). Haukur Þorgeirsson argues that this is true also of *fornyrðislag*, finding no exceptions in the poem *Völuspá* (Haukur Þorgeirsson 2016, 126). He notes that while

exceptions are found in some other poems, the “main rule” is evident (Haukur Þorgeirsson 2016, 126 fn. 3). By contrast, Eduard Sievers found these exceptions to be the main rule, and so does Goering, quoting *Sigurðarkviða* 31.5 “*gløð á golfi*” by way of example (48; cf. Sievers 1893, 58). Mutually exclusive views on what constitutes the rule versus exception have thus been presented, but the data on which the decision needs to be based have not.

This is not the place for a thorough exploration of the topic, but it may be useful to consider what Haukur’s “no exceptions” means in real numbers. By my count, focusing on the first lifts in Haukur’s collection of data, *Völuspá* contains at least 35 diagnostic verses (I have added 22.7 “*æ var hon angan*,” not mentioned by Haukur). I have included both compounds (e.g. “*í Fensolum*”) and simplexes (e.g. “*þær lög lögðu*”). The fact that at least 35 bimoraic first stresses are followed by a consonant and none by a vowel does seem significant, and Haukur’s claim thus appears to be valid, at least for *Völuspá*. Different eddic poems seem to follow slightly different metrical rules, however, some being more strictly regulated and skaldic than others. I would therefore not exclude the possibility that Haukur and Goering may both be right, but neither of them universally so. On this topic, I think it fair to say that *Prosody* draws attention to important factors that need to be taken into account, but that the analytical challenges in the sources are greater than the book conveys. This invites further study, which would be a crucial step towards arriving at an adequate description of ON metre. Such an investigation might also provide new insights on the interplay of skaldic and eddic metrical practices and their evolution over time. I can think of no better scholar to perform such further study than Goering himself.

In short, *Prosody* promotes the advancement of knowledge in several ways. Goering’s combination of linguistic and philological scrutiny deserves particular mention, since the two are far too often mutually exclusive in the study of a range of topics where only due attention to both can provide plausible answers. I would also single out his treatment of earlier scholarship as exemplary, communicating the main points in an accessible manner and clarifying strengths and weaknesses. Only in the discussion of the ON evidence do I get the impression that the bimoraic-throchee hypothesis to some degree gets the upper hand and that a less theory-driven approach might have made room for a more nuanced analysis. Even here, however, the argument is made with such skill and attention to detail that even if Goering may not provide fully convincing solutions to all problems involved, his study is likely to promote a more nuanced discussion of them in future scholarship.

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